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Security Council

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First semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

I. Introduction

1. The present report details progress made in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) since my report to the Security Council of 1 October 2004 (S/2004/777). It is submitted pursuant to the request of the Council, expressed in the presidential statement of 19 October 2004 (S/PRST/2004/36), that I continue to report on the implementation of the resolution to the Council every six months.

2. In its resolution 1559 (2004) of 2 September 2004, the Security Council, reiterating its strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders, called upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Council for the full implementation of that and all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. In addition, the Council:

(a) Called upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon;

(b) Called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias;

(c) Supported the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory;

(d) Declared its support for a free and fair electoral process in Lebanon's then upcoming presidential election, conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence.

The Council also reaffirmed its call for the strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon.

3. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004 I concluded that the requirements set out in the resolution had not been met. Pursuant to the Council's request of 19 October 2004, I herewith present my report on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) since 1 October 2004.

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II. Background

4. In my previous report, I set out in brief the relevant political history of Lebanon, the tragic civil war that raged in the country between 1975 and 1990 and the steps taken since to overcome the divisions in Lebanese society and leave behind the vestiges of the past.

5. In the six months since I submitted the report, the situation in Lebanon has become increasingly tense and has, in particular since the beginning of this year, deteriorated significantly.

6. Following the extension of Lebanese President Emile Lahoud's term by the Lebanese Parliament on 3 September 2004 and an assassination attempt against former Minister Marwan Hamadeh that left one person dead and two, including Mr. Hamadeh, injured, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri resigned on 20 October 2004. Mr. Hariri was replaced by Omar Karami, who formed a new Government on 26 October 2004. Mr. Karami's Government was widely perceived as favourably disposed towards a Syrian presence and influence in Lebanon. A standoff ensued between those loyal to Damascus, supporting Mr. Karami's Government, and those broadly opposed to what they saw as excessive Syrian influence and presence in Lebanon.

7. On 14 February 2005, former Prime Minister Hariri and 20 others were killed in a callous terrorist attack in central Beirut. Pursuant to a request by the Security Council (see S/PRST/2005/4), I dispatched to Lebanon a mission of inquiry into the causes, circumstances, and consequences of the killing of Mr. Hariri under the leadership of Irish Deputy Police Commissioner Peter FitzGerald, and forwarded its report to the Council on 24 March 2005 (S/2005/203). That report stated that the assassination seemed to have unlocked the gates of political upheaval and that it had further polarized the political scene to a threatening level. The report's main finding was taken up by the Council in its resolution 1595 (2005), in which it decided to establish an international independent investigative commission to assist the Lebanese authorities in investigating all aspects of this terrorist act, including to help identify its perpetrators sponsors, organizers and accomplices.

8. On 28 February 2005, Prime Minister Karami resigned during a parliamentary debate on the assassination of Mr. Hariri. Ten days later, on 10 March, President Lahoud asked Mr. Karami to form a new Government. Mr. Karami conditioned the formation of such a new Government on it being joined by the opposition in a national unity Government. The opposition voiced a number of demands: an independent international investigation into the assassination of Mr. Hariri; resignation of the heads of Lebanese security agencies, which the opposition held responsible for the assassination; a complete withdrawal of Syrian forces deployed in Lebanon; formation of a neutral Government overseeing the Lebanese parliamentary elections; and conduct of those elections without delay — prior to the end of May 2005. Mr. Karami's efforts to form a new Government continued, and the Prime Minister was widely expected to present a cabinet on 10 April. Unable to do so, Mr. Karami resigned again on 13 April. Two days later, on 15 April, President Lahoud tasked Najib Mikati with forming a new Government, after 57 members of the Parliament had nominated him, compared to 38 who had expressed their preference for Defence Minister Abdel Rahim Mrad. Mr. Mikati had received the support of the opposition bloc in the nomination. Mr. Mikati presented his new 14-

member Government on 19 April. On 22 April, the new Prime Minister declared that elections would be held on 29 May. On 25 April, General Jamil Sayyid, head of the General Security Department, resigned. Earlier, he and General Ali Hajj, head of the Internal Security Forces, had put themselves at the disposal of the Prime Minister's office.

9. The Lebanese people began expressing their political views publicly in frequent demonstrations, most of which took place in the central districts of Beirut. After a number of protests staged by the opposition, a large rally in support of the Syrian Arab Republic and its presence, organized principally by Hizbollah, took place in Beirut on 8 March. On 14 March, an even larger demonstration staged by the opposition was held in Beirut. The increasing instability prevailing in the Lebanese political arena was also reflected in a spate of bomb attacks, apparently directed against Christian targets in and near Beirut. On 19 March, a car bomb exploded in Beirut, leaving six people injured. On 22 March, a bomb was detonated in a commercial complex in Jounieh, killing three people and wounding seven. On 26 March, a third such bombing left two people dead and eight injured. On 1 April, a fourth bomb attack left at least seven people injured. In repeated statements, I called upon the Government of Lebanon to bring to justice those responsible and to prevent the situation from deteriorating and urged all concerned parties to do their utmost to safeguard Lebanon's stability and national unity. I also expressed my belief that this latest violence had to stop and that the Lebanese people should be allowed to decide the future of their country free from violence and intimidation. Around the time of the thirtieth anniversary of the eruption of the Lebanese civil war, on 13 April, a number of public events took place with participation of large segments of Lebanese society to reaffirm the national unity of Lebanon.

III. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

10. Since my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, the parties concerned have made noticeable and significant progress towards implementing some of the provisions contained in resolution 1559 (2004). Regarding the implementation of other provisions of the resolution, the parties have made no progress to date.

A. Withdrawal of foreign forces deployed in Lebanon

11. In resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called upon on all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon.

12. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I stated that we had ascertained that the only significant foreign forces deployed in Lebanon as at 30 September 2004 were Syrian. Israeli troops, which had remained in Lebanese territory for a significant period following the civil war, had withdrawn its forces from all Lebanese territory in May 2000 in accordance with resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), as I reported to the Council on 16 June 2000 (S/2000/590 and Corr.1) and as the Council subsequently confirmed in its endorsement of my report and its conclusions on 18 June 2000 (S/PRST/2000/21). In my report of 1 October 2004, I also stated that, according to the Syrian Government, there were a total of about 14,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon, including non-uniformed military intelligence officials.

13. On 5 March 2005, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad pledged in a speech before Parliament that the Syrian Arab Republic was going to withdraw its forces in Lebanon completely to the Bekaa Valley, and then to the Lebanese-Syrian borders.

14. President Assad confirmed this intention on 12 March in Aleppo, when he committed to withdraw all Syrian troops and intelligence personnel from Lebanon in fulfilment of resolution 1559 (2004). President Assad also expressed his unequivocal commitment to the full implementation of the resolution and reiterated his intentions and his commitment to me during a meeting in Algiers on 21 March and in a number of telephone conversations. The President stated to me that the full and complete withdrawal of Syrian troops and the intelligence apparatus would be carried out in two stages: the first stage would be the relocation of all military forces and the intelligence apparatus into the Bekaa Valley by the end of March 2005. A significant number of those troops, including intelligence personnel — representing about one third of all Syrian troops in Lebanon, according to Syrian authorities — would withdraw fully from Lebanon into the Syrian Arab Republic during this stage. A second stage of withdrawal would lead to a complete and full withdrawal of all Syrian military personnel and assets and the intelligence apparatus. Following a meeting between Syrian President Assad and Lebanese President Lahoud and the endorsement of the two-phased withdrawal plan by the Syrian-Lebanese Joint Military Committee on 7 March, the first stage of the Syrian withdrawal began on 8 March.

15. In reiterating the commitments made to me, President Assad, Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara' and Vice-Foreign Minister Walid Muallem assured the United Nations on 3 April 2005 that the second stage of the complete and full withdrawal of all Syrian troops and assets and the intelligence apparatus would be completed by 30 April at the latest. This commitment implied that all Syrian security forces and equipment would be withdrawn from Lebanon in fulfilment of the requirement of resolution 1559 (2004) as regards the withdrawal of Syrian security forces from Lebanon. The Syrian-Lebanese Joint Military Committee met on 4 April and endorsed the second stage of the full and complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, which began on 7 April.

16. During the meetings of 3 April, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic also informed me that it had, as a first step and in line with its earlier commitment, redeployed all its troops in Lebanon to the Bekaa Valley. It also declared that it had already withdrawn 4,000 troops into the Syrian Arab Republic and that it had closed Syrian intelligence offices in Beirut.

17. On 26 April, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to me a letter (see annex) stating that it had completed its full withdrawal of Syrian troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon, in fulfilment of its commitments to me and in fulfilment of the requirement of resolution 1559 (2004). As at that date, I had not been able to verify full Syrian withdrawal or to certify the implementation of the provision of the resolution that calls upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon. However, I have, with the agreement of the Governments of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, dispatched a United Nations mission to verify whether there has been a full and complete withdrawal of all Syrian troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon. This mission, carried out by a technical team composed of military experts, was to take up its work in the week beginning on 25 April. It will complete its work and

report to me as soon as possible. I have requested the two Governments to extend their full cooperation to this mission and to provide it with all relevant information and documentation available concerning the former deployment of all Syrian troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus in Lebanon.

18. Representatives of the Government of Lebanon have assured me that as Syrian forces have progressively withdrawn, the Lebanese armed forces have gradually assumed responsibility for the vacated areas. The Governments of both Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic had earlier indicated to me that they had concerns for the stability of Lebanon in the aftermath of a full Syrian withdrawal. Lebanese officials, however, have also assured me that the Lebanese armed forces had the necessary capacity to guarantee security and stability.

B. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

19. In resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council reaffirmed its call for the strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon, under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon, throughout the country. It also called upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Council for the full implementation of that and all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon.

20. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I described widespread allegations in Lebanon that the Syrian military presence, including a substantial component of non-uniformed intelligence officials, afforded the Syrian Arab Republic considerable leverage over Lebanese domestic affairs.

21. I have assigned the matter of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon the highest priority in my efforts over the past six months. I have met with Presidents Assad and Lahoud and have stayed in direct contact with other senior representatives of the two countries and other parties concerned. I have done so out of concern over the increasing domestic political polarization in Lebanon and the deteriorating security situation. I have also taken into consideration the impact of the withdrawal of Syrian military forces, including the intelligence apparatus, on the restoration of the sovereignty, unity and political independence of Lebanon. Furthermore, I have deemed it important to assign a high priority to this element of resolution 1559 (2004) because of the parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in May 2005. Free and credible elections according to constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence are a central indication of the sovereignty, unity and political independence of any democracy. Finally, the resolution places great emphasis on this matter by explicitly incorporating all relevant Security Council resolutions related to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon and by underlining the importance of free and fair elections according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence.

Syrian intelligence apparatus in Lebanon

22. The involvement of the Syrian Arab Republic in Lebanon, which began with the deployment of Syrian troops in the country in May 1976, has been characterized

by many observers as going beyond the reasonable exercise of cooperative or neighbourly relations. The recent report to the Security Council of the mission of inquiry into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri (S/2005/203), which also made that characterization, further discusses aspects of the relations between the two countries regarding governance in Lebanon.

23. In this context, it is of particular significance to note the commitment made to me by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on 3 April to withdraw all its troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon by 30 April and the letter the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to me on 26 April stating that it had completed its full and complete withdrawal (see annex). The Government also declared on 3 April that it had closed Syrian intelligence centres in Beirut.

24. The United Nations inspected the site of the Syrian intelligence headquarters in Beirut, near the Hotel Beau Rivage, on 5 April. In addition, a preliminary probe undertaken by the United Nations to verify the withdrawal of Syrian forces under the first stage of the withdrawal plan between 8 and 10 April found that the Syrian intelligence apparatus had vacated some sites previously occupied in locations throughout the country.[1] The preliminary probe also confirmed that there was ongoing movement to withdraw Syrian troops from the Bekaa Valley into the Syrian Arab Republic in implementation of the second stage of the full and complete withdrawal from Lebanon.

25. Some Member States, as well as members of the Lebanese opposition, have asserted to me that Syrian military intelligence has taken up new positions in the south of Beirut and elsewhere and has been using headquarters of parties affiliated with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic as well as privately rented apartments for their purposes. The Governments of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic have assured me that this is not the case. Representatives of the Government of Lebanon and other parties have also asserted that difficulties in completing a full withdrawal of all persons associated with the Syrian intelligence apparatus in Lebanon might arise owing to the family ties that Syrian officials have established in Lebanon over the past 30 years and to the existence of a network of informers among Lebanese citizens.

26. It will be the task of the United Nations mission I have dispatched to verify that all Syrian troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus have been withdrawn from Lebanon.

[1] The preliminary verification mission visited sites where Syrian troops had formerly been deployed in the following locations: in the Mount Lebanon area, Dhahr al-Wahsh, Aley, Dhahr al-Abadiyeh, Bhamdoun, and Mdeirej; in the north of Lebanon, Madfun, Hammat/Chekka, Tripoli (several sites), Deir Ammar, Amarein, Qlai'at and al-Arida; in the Metn area, Duwar, Ayroun, Dhour Choueir, Bologna, Mrouj and Majdal Tarchich and Tarchich; in the Bekaa Valley, near Sifri village, around Ba'albeck (several sites), Douriss, between Ba'albeck and Deir Ahmar, near Rayak, near Talia village, Maksé and Qabb Elias.

Establishment of mutual diplomatic representation

27. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I stated that it had been noted that Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic did not maintain diplomatic representation in one another's capitals. Former members of the Government of Lebanon have pointed out that a Lebanese representative office had been established in Damascus in 1970 as a first step towards the establishment of formal ties between the two countries. This office allegedly functioned into the 1980s. A Syrian representative office slated to be opened in Beirut was never established.

28. I have discussed this issue with the Governments of the two countries, both of which have stated that this was a bilateral issue. They have assured me, however, that in the wake of the full and complete withdrawal of Syrian forces, they aspired to a formalization of relations between the two countries.

Lebanese parliamentary elections

29. In the preamble of resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council underlined the importance of free and fair elections according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence. As I have outlined above, elections are also a means of reaffirming the full sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence in any democracy.

30. The term of Lebanon's Parliament expires at the end of May 2005. Consequently, parliamentary elections were scheduled to take place in Lebanon before that date. In the current context, the holding of free and credible elections according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence has taken on an even greater degree of importance and priority.

31. In preparation for the parliamentary elections, the Government of Lebanon under Prime Minister Karami approved a revised electoral law on 27 January 2005, which envisaged electoral constituencies based on administrative districts (*Qadaa*) and appeared to represent a compromise acceptable to both the Government and the opposition.[2] The parliamentary vote on the draft law, scheduled for 28 February 2005, did not take place, however, as the Parliament instead urgently decided to debate the repercussions of the recent assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri.

32. In the context of the resignation of the Government of Lebanon during that session and the prolonged inability of Mr. Karami to form a new cabinet, time was running increasingly short to organize and administer the elections before the current term of the Lebanese Parliament expired. Prior to Mr. Karami's renewed resignation on 13 April, the so-called Ain al-Tineh Gathering had repeatedly alluded to its intention to withdraw the Government's draft electoral law approved by Mr. Karami's first cabinet on 27 January 2005 and to submit a revised electoral law envisaging adoption of the principle of proportional representation and the drawing of electoral constituencies on the basis of the Lebanese governorates (*Muhafiza*).

[2] A revised electoral law had become necessary as Lebanon's last parliamentary elections were conducted in accordance with an exceptional electoral law applicable only for the 2000 elections. Since 1996, a new electoral law has been adopted for each election. The number of constituencies in the elections has varied from 12 in 1992 to 10 in 1996 to 14 in 2000.

33. Prime Minister Mikati has stated that his Government was to be a "symbol of moderation and national unity" and that it would have three primary goals: to prepare for the forthcoming parliamentary elections, to cooperate with the international independent investigation commission established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1595 (2005) and to address the economic situation and build confidence in Lebanon and among its neighbours about the state of the country. As at 26 April 2005, Lebanon did not yet have a law for the parliamentary elections. The new Prime Minister has pledged to organize and conduct the elections on time, that is, prior to the end of May 2005, and presented a new Government tasked with doing so on 19 April.

34. Both the Lebanese Government and the opposition have stated to me that their highest priority was the holding of free and credible elections. Such elections should be held on schedule and in accordance with an electoral law that is broadly accepted by the Lebanese people.

35. In order to ensure that such elections, based on an electoral law commanding broad acceptance among diverse Lebanese political interests, can be conducted in a free and credible manner, and in response to statements by President Lahoud and Prime Minister Mikati, I have been discussing with the Government of Lebanon the possibility of extending United Nations technical assistance at its request. I have further encouraged the idea that international governmental and/or non-governmental electoral observers should be invited to monitor the elections and am awaiting a request to this effect from the Government of Lebanon.

Israeli overflights violating Lebanese territorial integrity

36. Since my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, Lebanese territorial integrity has regularly been violated by Israeli aircraft flying into Lebanese airspace. The Government of Israel maintains its claim that these overflights are carried out for security reasons. My representatives in the region and I have regularly reiterated our call upon Israel to cease such overflights.

C. Presidential election process in Lebanon

37. In resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council declared its support for a free and fair electoral process in Lebanon's then upcoming presidential election, conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence.

38. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I described the process whereby President Lahoud's term was extended by three years on 4 September 2004.

39. In the present report, I have discussed the related issue of the Lebanese parliamentary electoral process, scheduled for May 2005, in the context of the resolution's provisions on the strict respect for and restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence.

D. Extension of Lebanese government control over all Lebanese territory

40. In resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council supported the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory. It also called upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Council for the full implementation of that and all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon.

41. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I stated that the Government of Lebanon had not extended its control over all of its territory.

42. Several incidents over the past six months have illustrated the fact that the Government of Lebanon does not fully exert control over all of its territory. However, the Government has stated to me that it is not constrained in extending its control over all Lebanese territory.

43. Along the Blue Line, there has been no noticeable change in the deployment of the Lebanese armed forces. Representatives of the Government of Lebanon have acknowledged that it has not yet deployed forces to the far south of the country. As I have stated, more needs to be done to meet the Security Council's call for extended measures to ensure the return of effective governmental authority throughout the south of Lebanon, including through the deployment of additional Lebanese armed forces. I have repeatedly urged the Government of Lebanon to do its utmost to ensure calm and to exert full control over the use of force across its entire territory.

44. Although the situation along the Blue Line has by and large been characterized by a tense calm over the past six months, there have been regular violations, at times causing deaths and injuries. On 9 January 2005, a Hizbollah roadside bomb attack against an Israeli military patrol vehicle killed one Israel Defense Forces soldier and wounded three others, and subsequent Israel Defense Forces tank and machine gun fire killed a French officer serving with Observer Group Lebanon and wounded a Swedish colleague. I issued a statement on this incident and the grave violations of the Blue Line that had occurred, condemning the military escalation along the Blue Line, urging both parties to exercise maximum restraint and reminding the Governments of Israel and Lebanon to ensure the safety of United Nations personnel deployed in the region. On 14 and 17 January, Hizbollah detonated explosive devices along the Blue Line, fortunately without causing any casualties. In response to those attacks, Israel carried out immediate air strikes against Hizbollah targets in southern Lebanon, reportedly injuring two Lebanese civilians. In another worrying development, on 7 November 2004, Hizbollah had launched an unmanned aerial vehicle from the Lebanese side of the Blue Line into Israeli airspace, which reportedly flew over Israeli territory before re-entering southern Lebanon and landing in the vicinity of Naqoura. Hizbollah launched a second such unmanned aerial vehicle on 11 April 2005, which crossed the Blue Line into Israeli airspace before returning to its base in southern Lebanon.

45. Palestinian armed elements based in Lebanon have likewise violated the Blue Line from the Lebanese side. On 28 October 2004, Palestinian armed elements based in Lebanon launched a rocket across the Blue Line into Israeli territory, which exploded in the vicinity of Shlomi. On 15 November, a Katyusha rocket was launched against Israel by hitherto unknown Palestinian elements. In the aftermath of the latter attack, the United Nations called upon Lebanon "to double its efforts in

order to ensure an immediate halt to serious violations" of the Blue Line. I was pleased to note that the Lebanese authorities spoke out against the incident and launched an investigation, but I reiterated my call upon the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority over all of its territory and to prevent such attacks.

46. Regarding the extension of Lebanese government control over all Lebanese territory vacated by Syrian forces, the Government of Lebanon has stated to me that the Lebanese armed forces were gradually assuming responsibility for the vacated areas. The Government has assured me that the Lebanese armed forces had the necessary capacity to guarantee security and stability in those areas from which Syrian troops were withdrawing. At the same time, the Government has expressed a number of concerns regarding the extension of its control in the Bekaa Valley, where the enforcement of law and order remains circumscribed by the operations of organized car theft, drug trade, tribal feuds and ongoing unrest among disadvantaged Shiite elements.

47. Some parties have expressed concern over the Government's recent decision to decrease the service period of conscripts to six months and to increase the extent of exemptions granted, reducing the number of Lebanese troops from a previous total of 65,000 to 45,000 by May 2005, consisting of 35,000 professional troops, 5,000 conscripts and 5,000 newly recruited professionals. The Government has stated to me that it was increasing defence expenditure in order to counterbalance the reduction in troop strength and that it was confident that an increasing professionalization of the Lebanese armed forces would similarly have positive effects.

E. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

48. In resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

49. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I stated that despite the successful efforts of the Government of Lebanon to significantly reduce the number of militias present in the country, several armed elements remained. I also reported that the most significant such group was Hizbollah.

50. Throughout the reporting period, the United Nations has conducted a dialogue with some relevant parties on the issue of the disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, but has not yet reached operational conclusions on this matter. It is noteworthy that the 1989 Taif Agreement, like resolution 1559 (2004), called for the disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and the delivery of their weapons to the Government of Lebanon.

51. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there has been no noticeable change in the status of Hizbollah since my report to the Council of 1 October 2004. The Government of Lebanon has maintained its position on Hizbollah, as outlined in that report, that Hizbollah is a resistance movement fighting to "liberate" the Shab'a farms area. However, this position is incompatible with Security Council resolutions. The Council has recognized the Blue Line as valid for purposes of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Lebanese territory in fulfilment of resolution 425 (1978). The Government of Lebanon should heed the Council's

repeated calls for the parties to respect the Blue Line in its entirety and extend its sole and exclusive control and authority over all of its territory.

52. Activities by Hizbollah along the Blue Line over the past six months, as described in paragraph 44 above, have highlighted the need for the Government of Lebanon to extend control over all of its territory under its sole and exclusive authority. Hizbollah has maintained a visible presence, notably near the Blue Line, through a network of mobile checkpoints, fixed positions and patrols. Hizbollah has further established several new positions and observation points, some of them close to United Nations positions.

53. Hizbollah also operates as a political party with representation in Parliament. In the context of the current political situation in Lebanon, Hizbollah leaders have stated their continued commitment to the stability and national unity of Lebanon but have vowed to maintain their armed stance vis-à-vis Israel for the time being. I have also taken note, however, that senior Hizbollah representatives have begun considering the possible disarmament of their group.[3]

54. In addition to Hizbollah, as I stated in my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, there are armed Palestinian groups in Lebanon. There has been no noticeable change in the status of such groups since that time. The Government of Lebanon has maintained its position regarding such groups as outlined in that report.

55. The increasingly tense political situation in Lebanon has led to the establishment and operation of so-called armed vigilante groups. These are not formal militias, but could signify the beginning of a return to the days of a widespread existence of armed groups and militias in Lebanon. We have cautioned against this worrisome development and discussed it with representatives of the Government of Lebanon, who have stated that preventive action would be taken.

IV. Observations

56. As at 26 April 2005, the requirements of resolution 1559 (2004) had not yet been met. However, the parties concerned had made significant and noticeable progress towards implementing some of the provisions of the resolution. Of particular importance is the commitment to me by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to withdraw all its troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon by 30 April 2005 and its letter to me of 26 April, stating that it had completed the full withdrawal of its troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus (see annex). There has been no progress on the implementation of other provisions of the resolution.

57. Lebanon has reached a critical juncture in its post-civil war history. In my previous report to the Council, I expressed the sentiment that more than 14 years after the end of hostilities and almost 5 years after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, it was time for all parties concerned to set aside the remaining vestiges of the past and to end, with finality, that sad chapter of Lebanese history.

[3] In an interview with *Le Monde*, published on 15 April 2005, Hizbollah Secretary-General Sheikh Nasrallah declared that the group was ready to discuss any topics with other Lebanese parties, including the issue of the weapons of the Islamic resistance.

58. The full and complete withdrawal of Syrian troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus would represent a significant and important step towards this goal and towards ending the heavy-handed foreign interference that has characterized Lebanese politics for decades. In my conversations with President Assad, I reached agreement that a technical United Nations verification mission would be dispatched in order to verify the full Syrian withdrawal (see para. 17 above). I will forward to the Council my conclusions based on the report of this mission as an addendum to the present report for its consideration.

59. The full and complete withdrawal of Syrian troops and military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon in fulfilment of the commitments made to me by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and in full compliance with resolution 1559 (2004) will also require the Governments of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to redefine the special relationship that exists between them. In this regard, I expect that the two countries will make significant progress towards the establishment of mutual diplomatic representation and an appropriate formalization of their special relationship prior to my next report to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004).

60. In my efforts over the past six months, I have assigned the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, specifically the pull-out of Syrian forces, and the matter of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon the highest priority. I have concentrated my efforts on the latter provision because of the increasing political polarization in Lebanon and the deteriorating security situation. I have also been concerned over the impact on the economy of the deteriorating security situation. Furthermore, I have been particularly concerned about the holding of parliamentary elections as a test of the sovereignty, unity and political independence of Lebanon.

61. It is highly unfortunate, in my view, that a six-week-long political stalemate in Lebanon raised the spectre of a delay of the parliamentary elections. Such a delay would contribute to further exacerbating the political divisions in Lebanon and threaten the security, stability and prosperity of the country. Both the Lebanese Government and the opposition have told me that their highest priority is the holding of free and fair elections. Such elections should be held on schedule and in accordance with an electoral law that is broadly accepted by the Lebanese people. In this context, I welcome Prime Minister Mikati's pledge to conduct the elections as scheduled.

62. In order to ensure that such elections can be conducted in a free and credible manner, I have been discussing with the Government of Lebanon the possibility of extending United Nations technical assistance at its request. I have further encouraged the idea that international governmental and/or non-governmental electoral observers be invited to monitor the elections and am awaiting a request to this effect from the Government of Lebanon.

63. I urge all parties concerned to comply with all requirements of resolution 1559 (2004) without delay and to fully implement that and all other resolutions related to the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon.

64. I continue to believe that the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) should proceed in a way that would best ensure the stability and unity of Lebanon, the

Syrian Arab Republic, and the wider region. In this context, I also remain committed to the implementation of all Security Council resolutions and the ultimate achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

65. I remain at the disposal of the Security Council and stand ready to continue to assist the parties in the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004).

Annex

Identical letters dated 26 April 2005 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

The Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to the President of the Security Council for the month of April and, with reference to the implementation by the Syrian Arab Republic of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), has the honour to convey a letter from Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, acting on behalf of the Syrian Government, confirming the full withdrawal of the Syrian troops, security apparatus and assets from Lebanon to their positions in the Syrian Arab Republic on 26 April 2005.

I would like to request that the present letter and its enclosure be circulated as an official document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Fayssal **Mekdad**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Enclosure

[Original: Arabic]

26 April 2005

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to officially inform you that the Syrian Arab forces stationed in Lebanon at the request of Lebanon and under an Arab mandate have fully withdrawn all their military and security apparatus and assets to their positions in Syria on 26 April 2005, and as such have completed their successive withdrawals that started years ago.

In the present letter, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic would also like to assure the Security Council that the implementation by its military and security forces of all the relevant provisions in Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) without delay was primarily dictated by Syria's unwavering commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions. This commitment is documented in the records of the United Nations and throughout the different stages of the crises and disputes that erupted in the Middle East region.

It is in this context that Syria feels that it is right and duty-bound in drawing the attention of the Security Council to the positive role it played in putting an end to the civil war in Lebanon, in preserving Lebanon's territorial integrity and in contributing with other fraternal Arab countries and friends to the realization of Lebanese national reconciliation amidst extremely complicated and perilous circumstances. Furthermore, Syria is also right in singling out one of its most significant achievements in Lebanon; that is, the valuable contribution it made of its own accord to building a national Lebanese army that became the pride of Lebanese of all stripes. Such achievements speak volumes about Syria's credibility and its sincere desire to see Lebanon as a sovereign and independent State.

The course that Syria chose to follow in complying with the resolutions of international legitimacy is an example that ought to be emulated. Syria feels that it is right to expect from the Council recognition of this event that is commensurate with its significance. Therefore, Syria urges the Council to make every effort and evince the same determination and seriousness in order to implement the remaining Security Council resolutions, namely, those relevant to the complete withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the occupied Syrian Golan, the Lebanese Shab'a farms and the occupied Palestinian territories to the line of 4 June 1967, in addition to guaranteeing the national rights of the Palestinian people. Syria stands ready as always to cooperate with these international efforts, and will implement its commitments so that these efforts are crowned with success.

(*Signed*) Farouk **Al-Shara'**
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Syrian Arab Republic